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ABSTRACT

The basic premise of this paper is that second language learning or teaching is an exercise in contrastive linguistics because learners filter and assimilate the second language through the categories and experiences represented by the first language to create situationally appropriate utterances. By selecting and exchanging information, participants in an interaction negotiate meaning, in order to establish common ground for the interpretation of their discourse. Problems in expression or comprehension are dealt with by a variety of communicative strategies such as topic avoidance, message abandonment, self-repair strategies, and collaborative strategies. Communicative interference occurs when speakers are unaware of a communicative problem and fail to express themselves appropriately or to interpret the interlocutor's meaning in a socially appropriate way. Communicative failure can occur at many levels and result in pragmatic failure in linguistic realization (the elements coded to carry messages, such as grammar and nonverbal features), communication (illocutionary value, reflecting the speaker's intention in the communication act), interaction (the system of address and turn-taking), or information (the knowledge exchanged or negotiated). Activities for developing communicative competence and for teaching and learning cultural competence are provided. (MSE)

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YOUR SLIP IS SHOWING:
Communicative interference in second-language learning

Philip Riley

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Introduction

The basic premise of this article is that any second language learning or teaching is an exercise in "contrastive linguistics" since learners filter and assimilate the L2 through the categories and experiences represented by the L1.

The work done in contrastive linguistics proper and, more recently and more valuably, in the study of interlanguage and learners' communicative strategies, has done much to help elucidate the nature of the relationship between L1 and L2 - or rather, between the L1 and the processes by which the L2 is learnt. However, with a very few exceptions, such studies have concentrated on the internal, structural properties of the languages in question and interference has consequently been

seen as the imposition of L1 structures on the L2 at the levels of phonology, lexis and morphology and syntax.

There are though, certain vital aspects of learning a foreign language which are not amenable to description in such structural terms. These are the sociolinguistic rules of use which characterise the communicative competence of the members of a given society. It is not enough to know how to construct grammatically correct sentences: we also need to know how to use situationally appropriate utterances.

This distinction between linguistic competence (the ability to manipulate the internal structures of the language) and communicative competence (knowledge of the external rules of use for that language) is, of course, fundamental to the "communicative" or "functional" approach to second language learning and teaching. However, lists of language functions, and the materials based on them, can give the impression that such rules are limited to the ways in which individual speech acts can be realised and that underlying the variations in realisation there is a finite set of language functions which is universal.

Whilst it is probably true that all languages do have certain functions in common - greeting, thanking, inviting and so on, - the situational features which lead speakers to select a particular realisation vary widely. For example, in many societies the age of one's interlocutor will determine how he or she is to be addressed, and not always in the same way, either, since the value attributed to different age-groups varies considerably from society to society.

It is also true, though, that there are certain functions or speech acts which can only be performed "in" one language, since they are the expression of cultural features which are not shared by the two societies. It is not difficult, for example, to find a language into which it is almost impossible to translate such acts as baptising or claiming an opponent's wicket ("howzat!").

Equally important is that the way discourse is organised also varies culturally. That is, if we stop looking at single functions and start examining sequences of speech acts we find that the selection/ordering

and combination of functions in a given situation will differ in the two languages. Whilst it is probably true that all societies require a greeting to be responded to by a greeting, we have no difficulty in finding cases where thanking is not the appropriate response to the receipt of a gift (or, in other cases, a compliment) and where inviting is not immediately followed by accepting of refusing.

There are other aspects of the organisation of discourse which can also differ considerably from society to society. Two of the most important are address (the distribution of speaking turns based on rights to the floor: who can speak to whom and when) and topic nomination (what subjects are suitable for conversation. These depend largely on the participants' perception of one another and of the situation in general.

We will, therefore, be looking at the ways in which participants in an interaction negotiate meaning, i.e; agree on the meaning of what they are saying. We will then look at the communicative strategies which are available to them to deal with problems in expression or comprehension. Finally, we will be studying pragmatic failure - communicative breakdowns resulting from the inappropriate use of mother-tongue sociolinguistic rules in the second language.

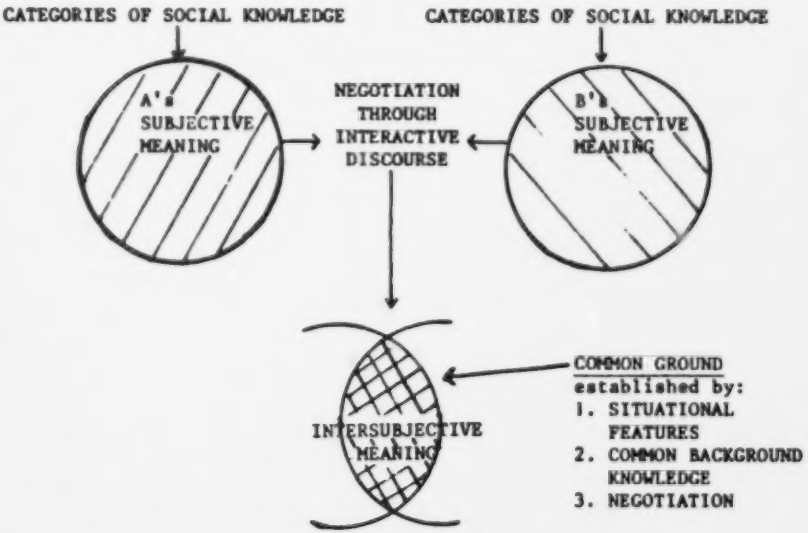
I The Negotiation of Meaning

"Communication is called for when the language user recognises a situation which requires the conveyance of information to establish a convergence of knowledge, so that this situation can be changed in some way. This transaction requires the negotiation of meaning through interaction. I refer to this negotiation as discourse. The term.... therefore refers to the interaction that has to take place to establish the meaning value of utterances and to realise their effectiveness as indicators of illocutionary intent. Thus interactivity is a necessary condition for the enactment of any discourse".

Henry Widdowson (1980)

Every single one of us is a unique personality, with our own history, experience, knowledge, beliefs and predilections. To a greater or lesser extent, we all inhabit a world of our own. When we wish to communicate with other people, we want them to understand what we are saying,

but they cannot understand what we are saying unless they understand us i.e. unless they have the knowledge and information which is necessary for the correct interpretation of our utterances. This is why much discourse is taken up with checking on whether our interlocutors do in fact have the necessary information and with providing information as we think necessary. We describe our private worlds to one another. However, different people need different information, so our choice both of information and of the way we formulate it, will vary according to our appreciation of our interlocutor's capacity to understand. Selecting and exchanging information in this way in order to establish common ground for the interpretation of the discourse is known as the negotiation of meaning. The purpose of negotiation is to bring about an overlap between the two private worlds, to "establish a convergence of knowledge" or a "reciprocity of perspectives", so that, however imperfectly or fleetingly, we inhabit the same world as our interlocutors. This process can be diagrammed thus:



The common ground of any interaction is established by:

1) Situational features which can be perceived by all interactants such as the fact that it is raining, or that one of them is holding a gun - and which can therefore be "taken for granted".
2) Common background knowledge which is already available to both participants (and which is known to be so).
3) Negotiation: giving or obtaining information necessary to the understanding of the discourse.

We will return briefly to points 1. and 2 later. For the moment, though, let us look at a simple (though absolutely typical) example of negotiation:

A is on the telephone, trying to explain to B where he lives, that is, he has a piece of information which he knows B does not possess.

A. 24 rue Marie-Odile, got it?
B. That's Nancy?...
A. Yeah.
B. I don't...
A. Look, you know Laxou
B. Yeah.
A. You know the Avenue de Boufflers?
B. No, I can't say I...
A. You know the road to Toul where it starts by the Renault Garage on one side and the Peugeot Garage on the other?
B. Right, right.
A. That's where the Avenue de Boufflers ends.
B. Yeah right
A. So the Avenue de Boufflers, you go along the Avenue de Boufflers maybe 300 yards, it's off on the right. Just before you get there there's a big service station on your right and rue Marie-Odile's the next turning.
B. Oh yeah, I know.

The piece of knowledge to be shared here is the meaning of "24 rue Marie-Odile", i.e. how it relates to the other parts of the system

"Nancy" - where it is. B indicates that he does not possess this information, at the same time providing a starting point for the negotiation. "That's Nancy?" B is in fact asking for confirmation on a hypothesis: A does not specify which town and since A and B are both in Nancy there is a clear implication that he must be referring to Nancy. (Alternatively, B may already have that much background information, that is, he knows that A lives in Nancy, but not exactly where.)

Having established a starting point, - Nancy, and a general area of reference, A now embarks on a process of progressive refinement. He does this by confirming a series of common points of reference. In fact, his first attempt is a failure ("You know the Ave. de Boufflers?" - "No, I can't say") and he is obliged to try again, going for something slightly less detailed ("You know the road to Toul...?"). As B indicates that each successive landmark is common knowledge ("Right, right") A is able to introduce his new information in relation to them.

We can only explain how to get to our house if we know where our interlocutor will be coming from. This underlines the point that we select the information we give different people according to our perception of their "position" relative to our "position". It is this type of procedure we refer to as the negotiation of personal meanings. It is no use A giving B a map-reference, however objectively precise (-unless B happens to have a copy of the same map, of course). A tries to select from his own store of information those items which are relevant and which he has good reason to believe will be known to B so that he can then introduce new information in a meaningful way by locating it on B's "cognitive map" of Nancy.

A's store of information will be the accumulated result of his experience, beliefs, attitudes, etc.: this is why descriptions (for formulations of place are just one sub-category of referenial descriptions) vary according to speaker as well as hearer. If we stop passers-by for directions to the market place, on might say:

"Well you go to past the Pig and Whistle, keep going till you come to the King's Head, turn left when you get to the Mitre and its right op-

posite", whilst another might say:

"Take the turning on the left of the Church of the Holy Remeeder, follow it all the way to St. Anne's Chapel and it's next to the Cathedral."

Speakers, then, vary their formulations according to their knowledge and on the basis of their perception of the addressee's geographical (in this case) knowledge, which is itself an aspect of identity. In France, where I have lived and worked for nearly 11 years, I am occasionally asked for directions by drivers on the main road which I walk along to get to the university. Their "perception" of me is based on the logic that if I am walking, I must be a local and that if I am a local, I must have the information they want. However, as soon as I open my mouth, my accent contradicts their perception and classification of me. How on earth can an Englishman know how to get to Strasbourg from here? They often display an impatient disbelief in my (absolutely correct!) instructions, or even just drive off in the middle of them.

Our communicative behaviour towards people varies according to what we believe to be their degree of knowledge; we sort them into categories (good friend, child, foreigner, neighbour, lawyer, Irishman, etc.) and we select and formulate our descriptions on the information we believe members of such categories to possess. These social stereotypes are absolutely fundamental to communication. Without them, we wouldn't know how to start, because we wouldn't know where our interlocutor was starting from. Of course, using stereotypes in this way can be dangerous if they are based merely on personal prejudices or if they simply do not fit the facts. It can be embarrassing if we mistake another customer for the shop assistant: but when we classify all women as bad drivers, all teachers as lazy, all old people as "past it", all Frenchmen as intelligent, our perception of reality becomes very distorted - though nonetheless very real to us as individuals.

How do we go about classifying people in this way? How do we decide how we are going to behave and communicate with them? Usually we begin by searching for clues in the situation, in particular, for indexi-

cal information. This term refers to those signs and behaviours which communicate messages about individuals, especially about their social identity and personality. Anything which tells us about the individual's age, sex, occupation, religion, race, nationality, marial status, wealth, state of health or mood, level of education, beliefs or attitudes, is included under this heading. A great deal of this information is non-verbal: we make judgements about people according to the clothes they wear (uniforms, Dior scarves, jeans) hair-styles (coloured, long, bald), the colour of their skin and whether it is wrinkled or not, jewellery (crucifix, wedding ring)... the list is an extremely lengthy one.

As an example of the way in which we use indexical information, consider the following three exchanges:

(i) Two cockneys

A. Where are you from?

B. Lambeth

(ii) Two Englishmen (Englishpersons!)

A. Where are you from?

B. London

(iii) Frenchman and Englishman

A. Where are you from?

B. England

In these exchanges, B is the same individual throughout. But look at the way he changes his information according to his perception of his interlocutors (i.e. the three different A's). This perception is based on his interpretation of the indexical information available to him from their different accents. In exchange (i) B recognises that A is, like himself, a cockney: he concludes that A possesses a detailed knowledge of London and selects his answer accordingly. In exchange (ii) B recognises that A is English but not a Londoner, so he provides A with an answer requiring a different level of information. In exchange (iii), B meets A in France and selects a very general formula indeed.

In all three cases, B selected his formula according to what he thought his interlocutor would understand and how much he thought his interlocutor wanted to know. If, as the conversation continued, it became apparent to B that he had 'underestimated' A in some way, he would then proceed to provide further information. For example, let us imagine that the Frenchman in exchange (iii) turns out to know London far better than B thought (i.e. than this stereotype had led him to expect) the conversation might well proceed as follows:

A. Where are you from?

B. England

A. Really, what part?

B. London. Do you know London?

A. Of course I do! I worked in the City for 5 years.

B. Oh well, then you know Lambeth where I come from...

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of classification and negotiation either to our understanding of language or to its functioning in events i.e. to discourse. The communicative event consists of the emanations from two "I's", like the ripples from two stones thrown into a pool. The production, form, direction and distance of the ripples can only be defined with reference to the stone that produced it. Yet when we communicate, we do the most extraordinary thing: we "put ourselves in someone else's place". We try to ensure that any descriptions we give, any references we make are "seen from their point of view". That is, we select that description which, out of all the possible descriptions available to us, is appropriate to this moment in this interaction with this person. We "try to find common ground". This process, the negotiation of meaning, is universal to all interactive language use: it is not some kind of sophisticated gloss or polite manners. As the social anthropologist Evans-Pritchard has observed:

"What does a Nuer mean when he says, 'I am a man of such-and-such a cieng'? Cieng means 'home', but its precise significance varies with the situation in which it is spoken. If one meets an Englishman in Germany and asks him where his home is, he may reply that it is England. If one meets the same man in London and asks him the same question he will tell one that his home is in Oxfordshire, whereas if one

meets him in that county he will tell one the name of the town or village in which he lives. If questioned in his town or village he will mention his particular street, and if questioned in his street he will indicate his house. So it is with the Nuer. A Nuer met outside Nuerland says that his home is cieng Nath, Nuerland... If one asks him in his tribe what is his cieng, he will name his village or tribal section according to the context... If asked in his village he will mention the name of his hamlet or indicate his homestead or the end of the village in which his homestead is situated... The variations in the meaning of the word cieng are not due to the inconsistencies of language, but to the relativity of the group-values to which it refers."

II. 1. Communicative Strategies

So far in this course for the sake of clarity of exposition, all the examples of the negotiation of meaning we have looked at have dealt with the formulation of place. However, it is essential to remember that participants in interactive events can and do negotiate any piece of information or reference which they realise is not initially shared. This can occur between native speakers, as in the following examples:

(i) A: .... one of those French cars
B: Is it a Peugeot?
A: No, Renault, big blue job
B: Oh, I know

(ii) A: I saw your Mum the other day
B: Oh yeah?
A: Not to talk to like. Just through the car window
B: Through the what?
A: The car window
B: What car window?
A: My car window
B: You got a car?
A: I haven't just got the window!

(From "The Likely Lads")

In exchange (i), A and B agree on the "identity" of a particular car, they mutually clarify what it is they are referring to: the conversation can now continue with each participant secure in the knowledge

that they are "talking about the same thing", so that there will be no misunderstanding.

In exchange (ii) A and B are old friends who have not seen one another for some time. While B has been in the army, A has gone up in the world and he now owns a car. He assumes that B knows this, but this is not the case. B has some difficulty adjusting his perception of A to accord with his new information, to classify him as a car-owner. He has to adopt a strategy of requesting more information until he has the knowledge necessary to the understanding of A's utterances (-which knowledge, as we have seen, A believed was already shared).

One very common situation where there is a lack of shared knowledge is, of course, where one of the participants is a foreigner. In such cases, the meanings of certain items - which can generally be taken for granted between native speakers - are not shared and have, therefore, to be negotiated. Consider the following examples of classroom negotiation:

(i) Learner: She's my ... she's in my family
Teacher: Your aunt?
Learner: No. She's married with my brother
Teacher: Oh, your sister-in-law
Learner: Yeah

(ii) Teacher: Russian eggs, prawn cocktail, honeydew melon...
Learner: What's that - "prawn"?
Teacher: What? Oh prawn it's ... they're a sort of sea-food
Learner: Fish
Teacher: No, not fish. Like very small lobsters or "homard".
Learner: Very small (laugh) crevette. Crevette?
Teacher: Yeah. Crevette - prawn.

2nd Learner: Honeydew?
Teacher: You know melon?
2nd Learner: "Melon"?
Teacher: Yes, well it's just a sort of melon
2nd Learner: With honey?
Teacher: Yes. No No No. Honeydew is just a name, it's just a

kind of melon. I think it's green. The skin is green and inside it's yellow.

2nd Learner: Is "pastèque"?

Teacher: I don't know, maybe

2nd Learner: A sort of melon

Teacher: Yeah, a sort of melon.

In exchange (i) the learner does not know the English term "sister-in-law". He therefore adopts, first, a strategy of semantic over-generalisation. But this misfires, as the teacher identifies a wrong referent ("our aunt?"). The learner then switches strategy, providing more information in the form of a circumlocution or description: "She's married with my brother". The teacher is now able to proceed to a correct identification, which the learner confirms.

In exchange (ii) the teacher is going through a menu in English. The learner has a comprehension problem this time, not one of expression. His strategy is to appeal for help. The teacher tries to provide the requisite information, first by giving a general classification ("seafood") then by analogy ("like very small lobsters") followed by a translation ("homard"). At this point the learner thinks he understands ("crevette") but he still wants his hypothesis confirmed ("crevette?"). The teacher provides the confirmation that mutual agreement on this meaning structure has now been reached ("Yeah. Crevette - Prawn").

The second learner now weighs in with a similar problem. What is a "honeydew". The teacher first checks that the learner does in fact know what a melon is, since he wants to adopt the strategy of approximation ("it's just a sort of melon"). However, this does not satisfy the learner, who has recognised "honey" and taken it literally. The teacher is now forced into a description of this particular kind of melon in terms of its significant features. The learner asks for confirmation of the hypothesis by producing a translantion ("Is "pastèque"?"). Unfortunately, the teacher is unable to confirm or disprove this hypothesis. However, this does show that it is not, in the teacher's view at least, terribly important to know what particular kind of melon this is. It

suffices to know, they agree, that it is just "a sort of melon".

In these extracts, we have seen a number of different communication strategies. Since, by definition, a strategy involves (a) a problem and (b) a plan for dealing with the problem, these strategies are also variously know as "repair strategies" or "comprehension strategies". In classifying such strategies, we need to ask whether we are dealing with a problem of expression or a problem of comprehension: this leads to difficulties of description and observation because, since we cannot tell exactly what is going on in people's heads, we can only deduce that comprehension strategies are being applied from clues in the learner's discourse i.e. via expression. Another important point to take into consideration is whether or not the strategy in question involves the cooperation of both participants in the discourse. Finally, it is important to note who initiates the strategy in question and whether there is an appeal for help.

If we take the point of view of the individual faced with a problem, we arrive at a definition of strategy of the following type:

"Communicative strategies are potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal."

(Faerch & Kasper, 1983)

Many linguists, though, are worried by the subjective quality of such definitions - clearly brought out in the vagueness of expressions such as "potentially conscious" - which give rise to considerable methodological difficulties. How do we know that a strategy is being applied - and what strategy? This is why other linguists prefer to limit the term strategy to those cases where there is a clearly observable collaboration between the parties in the discourse:

"The term relates to a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared. (Meaning structures include both linguistic and sociolinguistic structures). Necessary criteria:

1) A speaker desires to communicate meaning X to a listener.

2) The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure de-

sired to communicative meaning X is unavailable or is not shared with the listener.

Thus

3) The speaker chooses to
   a) Avoid - not attempt to communicate meaning X, or
   b) To attempt alternate means to communicate meaning X. The speaker stops trying alternatives when it seems clear to the speaker that there is shared meaning."

(Tarone, 1980)

It is this second definition which underlies the brief discussion and classification of communication strategies which follows. Remember, though, that we are still dealing with the negotiation of meaning: communication strategies are those plans we follow when, in interactive discourse, we come up against a conscious problem of some kind. They are cognitive mechanisms for dealing with an imbalance of knowledge. The different strategies represent different ways of trying to restore a balance of knowledge and, therefore, to establish commonground.

II. 2. Some Communicative Strategies

1) Topic avoidance

The speaker decides not to attempt to say or talk about X, because he does not feel competent to do so. This may be marked explicitly by such expressions as "Let's talk about Y instead".

2) Message abandonment

Having started an attempt to communicate a message, the speaker gives up because it is too difficult. This may be marked explicitly by such expressions as "I can't say it in English".

To some observers (1) and (2) are not really strategies, since they do not involve solving the problem in question. They do get rid of the problem, though, and so can be included here for the sake of completeness. There are two other main categories:

3) Self-repair strategies

- where the speaker tries to solve the problem on his own.

4) Collaborative strategies

- where the speaker tries to recruit the help of his interlocutor.

Note that the speaker may be either the native speaker/teacher or the foreigner/learner, though any particular strategy may be more commonly used by, say, the learner rather than the teacher.

ad. 3) Self Repair Stategies

For the sake of simplicity, we shall exclude from this category

(a) False starts: where speakers immediately correct themselves e.g. "I give gave him the book"

(b) New starts: where speakers correct themselves at the next possible completion point e.g. "I give him a book. I gave him a book"

(c) Rehearsed productions: where the speaker prepares his discourse in advance - by learning it by heart, for example.

(a) and (b) are excluded for purely practical reasons. (c) is excluded because Tarone's 3 (b) above does not apply: it is not really a strategy, since no negotiation is possible.

The self-repair strategies themselves include:

(d) Borrowing or transfer from another language, usually but not necessarily the speaker's mother-tongue e.g.:
"There was a lot of circulation" (for "traffic")
If no attempt is made to make the item conform to the target-language norms of pronunciation etc., we are dealing with language switch.

(e) Literal translation where the speaker takes a term from one language and translates it literally (or "word for word") into another e.g.: ".... it was in a handkerchief".
The equivalent expression in English for "dans un mouchoir" is "neck and neck".

(f) Word coinage where the speaker invents a word, either on the basis of his own language e.g.: saying 'inonded' for flooded, or on the basis of his knowledge of the target language, by making a noun from a verb, for instance, or vice-versa. Taking the noun "embuscade" he forms the verb "embuscader" which though not correct is perfectly comprehensible.

(g) "smurfing" (or "Schtroumpfing" if you prefer!): the speaker uses "empty" or meaningless words to fill gaps in his knowledge, relying on his interlocutor's guessing their meaning from the context.

"Thing" or "truc" are typical examples, but there are many others: "Whatsit", "thingummy", "machine" and so on.

(h) Approximation: the use of a word which the speaker knows not to be correct, but which he hopes will nonetheless convey his message. This may involve

- Under-generalisation: where a low-coverage word is used instead of a high-coverage one e.g. "rose" is used instead of "flower" or "construction" for "building".
- Over-generalisation: where a high-coverage word is used instead of a low coverage one: e.g. "bag" for "handbag".
- Inappropriate words of the same level of generalisation e.g. "lorry" for "van".

(i) Circumlocution: the speaker uses more words than are necessary to convey his message e.g.
"There was some land between the houses that nobody used" (for wasteground")

(j) Description: the speaker describes some aspect of the item to which he wishes to refer (appearance, function, etc.)
"The thing you use when you want to take the cork out of a bottle of wine" (for "cork-screw")

(k) Non-verbal communication: the use of mime, gestures, facial expression, noises, etc. as well as expressive interjections and intonation.

ad. 4) Collaborative Strategies

Here we are dealing with attempts to influence the interlocutor's behaviour in such a way as to solve a problem.

(l) Establishing identity as a foreigner, as someone who has had or will have problems in expression e.g.
"I'm sorry, I'm a foreigner. I only speak a little English. I don't understand."

(m) Appeals

- to speak more slowly, articulate clearly e.g.:
"Could you speak more slowly, please".

- To repeat:
  "Sorry, could you say that again, please"
- To explain or clarify:
  "Sorry, but what does X mean?"
  "I'm sorry, but I don't understand what you mean."

(n) Requests for assistance

- For translation e.g.:
  "How do you say "gentil" in English?"
- For adjudication, evaluation and correction e.g.:
  "Is that right?" "Can you say that in English?" "Which is correct, X or Y?"
- Gambits: where the speaker asks his interlocutor to provide a missing item e.g.:
  "It's one of those ... you know ... I can't find the right word ... what's it called?"

(o) Checks

Having formulated a hypothesis about whether messages have been understood, speakers can test them or check on them.

- Feedback: Speakers provide or request feedback as to whether their own or their interlocutor's messages have been understood: "I know", "I understand"/"Do you understand?" "Know what I mean?".
- Confirmation: Speakers make explicit their interpretations of their interlocutor's meaning or intention e.g.:
  "You mean you want me to ...?"
- Additional information: Speakers provide or request further information in order to test their hypotheses about their interlocutor's meaning or understanding e.g.:
  "Spain - you know?"
  "Where they fight bulls?"
  "Yeah - Spain."

III. 1. Communicative Interference (I)

So far in this article, I have been talking as if speakers always manage to deal satisfactorily with their communicative problems. Unfortu-

nately, this is manifestly not the case. Even when speakers are aware of their problems, they may lack the capacity to deal with them. More importantly, though, they may be unaware that any problem exists and consequently fail to express themselves or to interpret their interlocutor's meaning in a socially appropriate way. This is usually due to their unconsciously employing the sociocultural rules of their mother-tongue and can give rise to a wide range of misunderstandings and *faux pas* ('pragmatic failures') which may vary from the trivial to the catastrophic. When I impose the phonological or syntactic rules of my mother-tongue or another language, people might say that I have an accent or that I don't speak the language very well. But when I impose my mother-tongue social rules, I will be seen as not behaving very well and judged as being rude, stupid or aggressive.

III. 2. Some Examples of Pragmatic Failure

Pragmatic failure occurs when we fail in some way to understand a speaker's full intention in saying something. For some reason, we do not go succesfully from what is said to what is meant. It is, therefore, that umbrella term covering a wide variety of communicative problems which prevent the successful grasping of the contextual meaning of an utterance. Consider the following examples:

Examples:

(i) Teacher: "Mr. A. would you like to read the passage aloud, please?"
Mr. A : "Er ... well, no, thank you very much."
(Mr. A failed to identify the force of the teacher's utterance as a request for action. He thought his personal preferences were being consulted.)

(ii) Native Speaker (American): " ... great to see you again, we really must get together some time and ..."
Foreigner: "When? Tuesday?"
(The foreigner has misunderstood a polite leave-taking formula, attributing it the value of an invitation.)

(iii) Teacher of French to a group of immigrant workers: "Right, I want to know what this is called. What is it ? ... Anyone?

We had it last week. What is it, do you remember? Ali? Bashur? Well, the answer isn't written on the floor, you know ... Anyone?"
(The workers' respect for a teacher is so great that it prevents their answering direct questions which are all taken as being purely rhetorical. Moreover, it would be impolite to meet the gaze of a social superior, so they do not know they are being 'addressed'.)

(iv) A Frenchman invited a Dutchman round for an evening meal. The Dutchman arrived three hours earlier than he was expected.
(Different senses for the 'same' sign).

(v) German tourist to a Lapp: "How many reindeer have you got?"
Lapp stumps off furiously.
(unacceptable topic nomination)

(vi) Teacher (holding door open) "After you ..."
Mme V.: "Pardon."
Teacher (bewildered) "What?"
(selection of wrong politeness formula for this particular conversational routine).

(vii) Very young shop assistant: "There you are dear."
Old lady: "Don't you 'dear' me!"
(failure to agree on relative social positions and consequently, on a mutually acceptable style.)

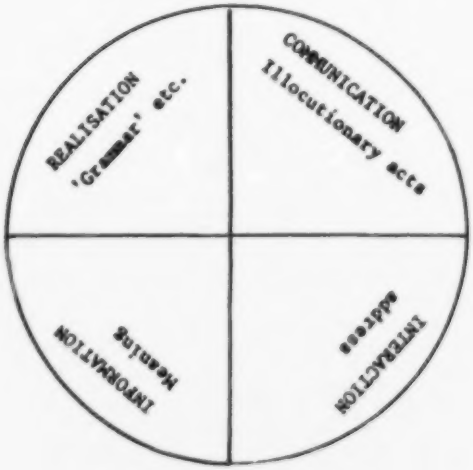
(viii) Parent: "Are those incredibly filthy boots in front of the door in everybody's way yours?"
Son: "Yes" (continues staring at T.V.)
(Deliberate (?) refusal to apply normal inferencing procedures)

(ix) Teacher: "... So what do you think you would do if you were Chairman of the TUC?" (Long silence : after several more attempts it becomes clear to the teacher that the learners do not recognise the acronym.)
"...TUC is short for Trades Union Council."
(Lack of shared knowledge or 'common ground')

III. 3. Categories of Communicative Interference

As the examples above clearly show, communicative interference can occur at many different levels and result in many different kinds of pragmatic failure. It would obviously be useful if teachers had at their disposal some way of identifying the different types of failure. To do this, we first need a model of discourse, a framework which would provide the pigeon-holes into which we could sort the various errors we observe. In very, very rough outline, such a model might look like this:

Strands in the construction of discourse



Realisation

This refers to various elements which can be coded to carry messages. The most important and familiar of these is, of course, the 'grammar' of speech. But we should not forget that there are a number of non-verbal features (such as intonation and voice quality, gesture or facial expression) which can also be conventionally patterned to carry messages.

Communication

Here we study the communicative acts which speakers perform in the course of an interaction. One of the most important dimensions of the meaning of a communicative act is its illocutionary value, such as "inviting" or "refusing", which reflects the speaker's intention on performing that act.

Interaction

Oral discourse involving more than one person is necessarily a collaborative activity. For that collaboration to work smoothly, we need to have a system of mechanisms for the distribution of speaking turns. Our rights to the floor, though, are not purely mechanical; they are based on the system of address, which is itself the most important linguistic manifestation of role.

Information

This refers to the knowledge which participants exchange or negotiate in order to establish the common ground essential to mutual comprehension (see Section I: "The Negotiation of Meaning").

Can the approach to discourse sketched above help us describe and understand different types of pragmatic failure in a cross-cultural setting, such as the language classroom? I believe it can, though clearly much remains to be done. What follows is in no sense a strict taxonomy : rather, it indicates ways in which one might begin collecting evidence of communicative interference i.e. deviations in the use of an L2 which are due to the speaker's imposing his L1 socio-cultural rules.

1) A particular grammatical structure may be common to the learner's L1 and L2. Yet it might realise a function or functions which are not common to both : for example in French, English and Swedish there is a structure 'Si (if, om) + conditional clause'. Observation leads us to the conclusion that the French structure can be used to realise at least three different functions:

   a) Hypothesising.

      "S'il arrive, je le lui dirai."

   b) Requesting for confirmation.

"Si je suis prêt?" (C'est bien ce que tu viens de me demander ?)

c) Suggesting.

"Et si on allait au cinéma ce soir!"

If we turn to colloquial Finnish-Swedish, we find that there too, the 'om and conditional' structure can realise these three functions:

a) "Om han kommer, ska jag berätta det för honom."

b) "Om jag är färdig?" ("Jo, jo!")

c) "Om vi sku' ga pa bio i kväll!"

However, when we turn to English, we find a very different kettle of fish!

a) "If he comes, I'll tell him."

b) *If I am ready?

c) *If we go to the cinema this evening.

Note what the asterisk means here : these perfectly correct grammatical constructions can not (= do not) function as requests for confirmation or suggestions.

This explains cases of complete breakdown, where the learner tries to make a suggestion with 'if' - and the native-speaker simply waits patiently for the utterance to be finished:

Learner: "If we went to the cinema?"

(Long pause)

Native speaker: "What would happen?"

2) As we saw earlier, speakers usually have a number of options for realising any particular speech act. Personal style and personal relationships between the speaker and the learner will, of course, play a major role in determing this choice! However, studies such as those by Olshtain (1981) (2) clearly show that there are also cultural 'preferences'. For example, to apologise for damaging the car you so kindly lent me I can:

a) Make an expression of apology ("I can't tell you how sorry I am")

b) Explain or account for my behaviour ("There was a huge wasp")

c) Acknowledge responsibility ("It was my fault, though")

d) Make an offer of repair ("Of course I'll have it seen to")

c) Make a promise of forbearance ("And it'll never happen again, I swear")

In 'serious' cases, a speaker might avail himself of all these possibilities. But by and large it would seem that different societies privilege different choices. Olshtain says that Hebrew speakers prefer (b) and the fact that they do not actually say "I apologise" makes them sound relatively unapologetic to speakers of English. English speakers, it seems to me, do prefer (a) which, I suspect, makes us sound quite grovelling to speakers of French who favour (b).

At a deeper level, there is also the problem of knowing just what calls for an apology. An expression of admiration, a source of pride in the L1, can be regarded as dishonourable by L2 speakers, for example.

3) Sequences of speech acts ('conversational routines') may vary considerably from language to language and situation to situation. For example, in English and Swedish a compliment is generally followed by thanks, whereas in Thai (Richards, 1983) and French it is played down ("Oh this old thing, I've had it for years"!). As Coulmas (3) has pointed out, all languages are rich in conventional exchanges of this kind. Sometimes, though, the constituent acts vary from language to language, as in the example above - or where apologies are used to express gratitude after an offer : this is apparently the case in Japanese, where English would of course have thanks.

Even where routines are superficially the same, their use may differ considerably. An Irish friend of mine on a recent visit to France was rather disappointed to find that when he replied "Merci" to the offer "Tu prendras un petit cognac?" he had refused it.

Work on discourse processing (such as Grice's Maxim's and Searle's 'Inferencing procedures' and Gordon and Lakoff's 'Conversational postulates') is beginning to throw interesting light on the problem of speech act sequences (amongst other things). But however rich and detailed such studies may be and however universal the rules of natural logic they reveal, it is unlikely that they will provide

direct input for teaching purposes. There are two main reasons for this: the first is the highly idiomatic nature of many routines and sequences from the formal point of view (e.g. "Mais il ne fallait pas!" as an expression of appreciation in French) and the second is the completely culture-bound notion of situation.

Sequences of speech acts will vary according to the situation as culturally defined and perceived by the participants. It is, therefore, possible to find instances of speech acts which occur in one language and not in another. Indeed, it is by no means necessary to look for 'exotic' situations such as initiation ceremonies in Bali or cricket matches in Yorkshire to find speech acts which have no translation equivalent ("Howzat?"). For example, there is no routine in English which corresponds to the French 'Bon appétit' or Finnish 'Hyvää ruokahaluaa'.

An important aspect of speech act sequencing is simple repetition : how many times should an offer be repeated ("Do have some more cabbage") to be seen as sincere -and after how many repetitions does it become impolite? In England my impression is that the limit is as low as two ("Are you sure you won't have any more cabbage?"). On the other hand, when I dine with Syrian friends, I always overeat because after the fifth, sixth, seventh time they offer ("But this is your chicken breast") I run out of ways of refusing politely. Similarly, in Finland a host or hostess will expect to call guests to the table at least three times : such a delay would be regarded as positively rude in France. Moreover, the hosts would expect to be thanked by the guests on the occasion of their next meeting, even if this were to take place several months later using formulas for which there would be no real translation equivalent in many other languages ("Kiitos viimeisestä", "Tack för Senast").

Finally, it is important to note that a difference in the order of a sequence of speech acts may also reflect a considerable difference in social values and priorities. To take just one example :

last year the Secretary of State for Industry, Sir Keith Joseph at the time, visited Japan for important negotiations. At the beginning of the meeting both the British and Japanese teams arrived on time, but then had to wait while the interpreters went into what seemed an interminable huddle. In the end, the British sent someone to ask what it was all about and were told that the interpreters were introducing themselves to one another and filling one another in on their family backgrounds and so on. What would have been regarded as a topic of coffee-break conversation in Europe was seen by them as a necessary condition to successful social interaction.

4) Information

The most obvious and indeed the most common source of pragmatic failure is lack of shared information or common knowledge. We have to be more explicit with people we don't know because we don't know what they don't know. This is particularly true in dealing with a second language situation where interactants do not necessarily even share the same knowledge of the language. Hence the intense interest in interpretive strategies and the negotiation of meaning at present (4). These strategies can be seen as attempts to deal with potential or actual pragmatic breakdown, due to the inadequacy of a speaker's linguistic means relative to his communicative intention.

Topic nomination is central to the information of discourse as here understood. But it should not be thought of simply in static terms: in such and such a society topic X is taboo. This disguises the way in which we select topics according to the social roles and categories we attribute to our interlocutors (which is a function of our knowledge of them). Where our knowledge is limited, we play it safe. We nominate topics like the weather which cannot possibly cause offense : mind you, have you tried telling a farmer what a lovely summer we had last year? The point is not a trivial one : every social group has its sore points, which means that acceptable topics vary enormously, so that what is 'safe' here is 'sore' there. Even topics which are regarded as safe enough to be used as opening formulae in some societies may be regarded as too personal in others :

European: "How do you do?"
Asian : "Are you married?"

(Artificial example)

Similarly, work on specific types of discourse, such as telephone calls has shown that the topic (e.g. identifying oneself) may vary from culture to culture. In England, even private individuals often answer the phone with their name and number : in France this is almost unheard of.

Last year, the research centre where I work (C.R.A.P.E.L.) was honoured by the visit of a group of lecturers and university administrators from the Asian Peoples' Republic. Two members of this group who were especially interested in the teaching of English asked if they could sit in on any of the evening classes for adults ("formation permanente") which we run, and of course I was happy to arrange this for them.

The teacher in question asked the visitors if they would like to be introduced to the members of the class - a mixed group of eight professional and commercial people. No, absolutely not, they just wanted to observe - which they proceeded to do for the two hours the class lasted. At the end of the period, the teacher, who had been feeling somewhat awkward with these two voluntarily anonymous orientals following her every move, tried once more to bring them in. Would they like to ask the learners any questions about the course, its contents, methodology and so on?

Yes, they did have just one question, they replied. They then went round the whole group asking each learner the same question: "How old are you?"

As you can imagine, everyone was slightly taken aback. One of the ladies present - a very elegant doctor "d'un certain age" tried to fob them off. Oh là là, she was very old. "Yes, of course you are, madam", came the reply.

Now we can exclude the possibility that this was some kind of statistical survey - that sort of information was already available to them

in a far more detailed way and for far greater numbers of people. And even if it hadn't been, you just can't go round asking people point-blank how old they are. At least, not middle-aged French ladies you can't.

Why not?

At the risk of seeming facetious, I would suggest that this question, i.e. questions of this type, are amongst the most important which the discourse analyst can ask if he wishes to get below the formal surface of the discourse and start investigating it as a process of negotiation constrained by its own specific socio-cultural rules. Moreover, if we are lucky, it is possible to see those rules as the realisation or operation of a society's structures and values. Discourse is society in motion. In the case we are discussing, for example, it is quite possible we are dealing with a case where the rules of topic nomination have been breached. In any given society, as we all know, there are things we can and cannot talk about, especially when we meet someone for the first time. Small talk comes in different sizes.

Now of course topic nomination is, in itself, of considerable interest to the discourse analyst. However we label it - "subject", "topic", "theme", "propositional content" - what we are talking about is a major influence on the type of discourse we produce, and in particular on its information structure. But the point which I am trying to make here is that, if we leave things there, if we are content simply to draw up a list of socially appropriate and inappropriate topics, we will have a description of the problem, but no explanation of it. We will know what you can and can't talk about but not why. We will be dealing with what Chomsky very disparagingly calls "natural history" by which I take him to mean precisely the establishment of descriptive taxonomies which have no explanatory power. In very general terms, he holds that discourse analysis, and work in the field of pragmatics as a whole, simply does not have the conceptual and methodological tools available to make explanatory as opposed to "merely" descriptive statements. In the sense that syntactic models are far more sop-

histicated, detailed and precise than anything discourse analysts have to offer at present, Chomsky is right, as one would expect. Discourse analysis (DA) has a history of about 30 years maximum: syntactic studies date b ack to at least Aristotle. But this does not mean that the problems of DA are either uninteresting or insoluble.

If DA is to have any explanatory power, we need to be able to formulate hypotheses about why, in the case in question, our Korean's behaviour was what it was. Why, for him, was it definitely socially acceptable and appropriate to ask a middle aged woman her age - but most definitely not for her? Can we suggest any explanation for these discourse rules in terms of underlying cultural structures and values? Well of course we can, or I wouldn't have chosen this particular example and it is one which has probably occurred to you, namely that in many oriental and Asian societies , increasing age is valued, it is a social attribute which implies knowledge and confers status. In other words, this particular scale of values is the very opposite of what we generally find in the Western Society.

Once we know this, or rather, once we take it into account, the Korean visitor's behaviour "makes sense". We see it as the behaviour of a rational, if mistaken, man. There is an extremely important lesson to be learned here for the discourse analyst. It is that rationality is a cultural variable. For the moment I would just like to emphasise the extremely relativistic nature of the concept of "socially appropriate behaviour" (or "sanity", if you prefer). In some societies it makes sense to examine a chicken's entrails in detail before deciding to go to war, invest money or choose a new wife. In others it does not. If we discovered a stock-market analyst in his City of London office picking at a chicken's giblets on his desk, we would probably judge him to be insane, or at least inefficient. But we must beware of applying the same criteria to a different society and a different situation. Above all, we must beware of cross-cultural value judgements: who are we to say that we are more civilised than the ancient Romans?

A further point worth noting is that the rule for topic nomination that

we have postulated - that age is not a suitable subject - is susceptible to considerable refinement. Moreover, that refinement is itself expressed in terms of social structures or rather by cross-referencing with other sets of categories, such as the age and sex of the interlocutor. It is obviously no offence to ask someone who is obviously young what their age is: we do it all the time with small children. And it is in some sense worse to ask a woman her age than it is to ask a man. I apologise if I seem to be sanctioning sexist stereotypes here: I quite appreciate that there is a growing resentment amongst women about the way they are written off socially at the appearance of their first grey hairs whilst their husbands are allowed to go bald, wrinkled and pot-bellied with no loss of prestige. But the point is that we <u>are</u> looking at stereotypes, at the unconscious values and categories which discourse articulates. And it is precisely because these values or attitudes are what they are, and are by definition generally accepted, part of "common sense", that women have something to object to.

But, questions of natural justice apart, from the discourse analyst's point of view it makes good technical sense to correlate such fundamental social categories and the value-systems associated with them with various parameters of discourse, since it enables the analyst to go beyond "mere" description towards a more explanatory model.

With these important implications in mind, let us now go back to our point of departure, <u>topic nomination</u>, for a more general consideration of its functions in discourse. The danger is one of not being able to see the wood for the trees. When you are working at the nitty-gritty level of DA, you cannot forever be breaking off to give solemn disquisitions about underlying social structures: on the other hand, the minute you lose sight of such matters, you rob your work of most of its value.

Constraints on what forms an appropriate topic for a given conversation in a given society are of many different kinds:

a) Topic Exclusion

Certain topics may be excluded since their very selection would imply, within that particular society's system of values, that the speaker had a low opinion of his or her interlocutor. The lady doctor in the example we have been discussing felt that to give an accurate reply to the Asian visitor's question would have placed her in an inferior position. This was "true" for her, and for anyone sharing her system of values; but this did not include the visitor which is precisely why he felt able to ask the question. Clearly, we are touching here on the rules of politeness whose aim is to regulate behaviour in such a way as to protect both speakers and hearers from any untoward effects resulting from their interaction.

For many people, income is an excluded topic. This, at least, is the only conclusion I can draw from the number of French people who have mentioned indignantly to me that U.S. Americans have asked them how much they earn.

Of course, one of the major expressions of the values of a society is its religious institutions. So it is not surprising to find that religious taboos invariably give rise to discourse taboo i.e. topics which cannot normally be brought up in conversation. Sometimes these are very general indeed, as when any reference to the future is discouraged. I myself was brought up in a strictly religious atmosphere, but as a London teenager, I wanted to discuss current moral issues. Like most teenagers, I equated "morality" with "sex", but found it totally impossible to have any kind of conversation on topics of this kind - abortion, birth-control, divorce, etc. with my parents, or indeed with any adult member of my family. I honestly believe that they were incapable of talking about these matters: they had never acquired the relevant concepts simply because discourse on these topics was not allowed, it was "talking dirty". From the purely institutional point of view, this is a very satisfactory state of affairs: such cultural values cannot be challenged if they cannot be talked about. They quite literally cannot be called into question.

A well-known example of topic exclusion is the fact that one should not refer to an Arab's possessions, above all in an admiring way, since he will feel honour-bound to give them to you. Again, top British and American businessmen going to Japan are warned not to talk about the very products of services they have come to sell and above all never to praise them. This, along with all discussion of money matters, should be left to junior staff on both sides.

Within cultures, there will be a natural tendency for different topics to be excluded according to variations in sub-group, setting and situation: young officers in the British army were expected to avoid any reference to politics, women (i.e. named individuals) and religion whilst they were in their Mess. The idea was, of course, to avoid anything that might give rise to discussion, solidarity being the major value.

b) Constraints on Opening Topics (or formulae)

A German colleague reports that for a long time he had the impression that all Englishmen were simple-minded, because of their incessant inane blathering about the weather. Certain topics which can be nominated in ordinary conversation are subject to restrictions as regards their position of occurrence. In some cases (as with the weather in English) they will be favoured as opening formulae, presumably because they are regarded as "safe". In other cases, perfectly acceptable topics (in a given society) are felt to be inappropriate as openers. For example, Asians will often ask "Are you married?" early in a conversation : when I say "early" here, I am being ethnocentric - what I really mean is "earlier than my British-English rules of discourse would allow".

Similarly, Loveday (1982) points out that the sharply-defined hierarchical values of the Japanese mean that they feel the need to situate their interlocutors socially before an interaction can begin:

"When meeting foreigners, Japanese transfer their LI over-differentiated system of social hierarchy, introducing themselves, for instance, as "I belong to Mitsubishi Bank" and immediately asking seemingly offensive questions to Westerners because of their conversational sequencing such as "What is your job?" "How old are you?" and "What is the name of your company?"

Suitable topics for opening conversation may include the weather, as in English, but also one's interlocutor's health, requests for local or family news and the state of the roads.

c) Constraints on Topic Nomination related to the Identity of the Interlocutor

Many topics can or cannot be touched on in conversation only with certain individuals or categories of person. Such decisions will usually be directly related to a speaker's perception of this interlocutor's social identity or group membership, i.e. it will be a reflection of what we know about them and of what we think they know about us. We do not have the same topics of conversation for our encounters with a doctor, a gynaecologist, our children's teachers, a car mechanic, a child, the captain of our sports team, etc. Similarly, we learn not to nominate topics which we know our interlocutor cannot handle, for lack of knowledge, or which simply go beyond what are regarded as reasonable topics or questions, "Why are bananas yellow?" "Why do people grow old?"

It is no concidence that such questions are typical children's questions, since the child is actually engaged in the process of establishing just what reasonable questions are and to whom the various categories into which they fall can be addressed. He is writing his social encyclopedia.

Sometimes the appropriateness of a topic will be related to our interlocutor's individual identity, his personality, as opposed to his membership of a social group. In his book on "One Upmanship", Stephen Potter points out that one of the best ways of embarrassing someone who has just told you a story about a man with a wooden leg is to roar with laughter, slap your thigh - and then to limp off rather sadly with your own leg as stiff as a plank. Because he lacked the relevant knowledge about you, he has nominated a topic - wooden legs - which is inappropriate since it threatens your face by ridiculing a social category to which you belong.

Putting it another way, "On ne parle pas de corde dans la maison d'un pendu". We have to try to avoid stepping on people's corns.

5) Interaction

In any situation, discursive rights and duties are distributed according to the participants' perception of their roles, and in accordance with social values as expressed in the rules of address. Such rights and duties are very rarely equally distributed : for almost any role relationship (customer-shop assistant, parent-child, doctor-patient, teacher-learner) there are clear differences as to who can initiate and close exchanges, for example. They are often the subject of 'proverbial' expressions ("little boys should be seen and not heard") and of explicit instructions : "What do you plead?", "Don't answer back" and so on.

However, both roles and status vary from society to society. Consequently, the type of interaction in terms of rights to speak, vary too. To take extreme, but common examples, the role 'soldier' and 'policeman' are usually a direct reflection of the nature of the State in question. You can chide a group of young French conscripts for making a nuisance of themselves on a train : this would be highly inadvisable in certain countries.

Pragmatic failure, at the level of interaction and address can be generally discussed under headings :

a) Failure to take the initiative

There are occasions, for example, where one is expected to greet (introduce, etc.) in one culture but not in another. In France, for example, successive arrivals in a shop queue greet all earlier arrivals ("Bonjour Messieurs-Dames! ") whether they know them or not. So do Germans boarding trains. In England, such behaviour would be regarded as eccentric.

Who makes the first move when it is time for guests to leave? In England, it is usually the guests themselves ("Look at the time! We really must be getting along."). But this is not universal especially in cases where perceived differences in status are very wide.

b) Illicitly taking the initiative

This is 'revolutionary discourse', since it will always imply a con-

frontation between the different participants' perceptions of their relative roles and status. Reactions will therefore often be out of all proportion : "Who do you think you are!" "Who asked you?" "Cheek!", "Mind your own business!" "Shut up!" "Speak when you're spoken to and not till then!" This is particularly dangerous, because for many people the dyad native speaker/foreigner is itself enough to give the privilege of taking the initiative to the native speaker alone. The foreigner is no more expected to strike up a conversation in a pub (despite what certain 'communicative courses' might say) than a learner is expected to start the lesson ("Right, everybody, open your books at p. 92").

c) Failure to reply

Example (iii) on page 57 is a good illustration of how communication breaks down due to failure of address. The addressee that is, does not know that he is expected to reply or is unable to do so. Invariably, this is ascribed to an unwillingness to do so and is often at the root of racist stereotypes. ("They're so shifty/lazy" etc.).

d) Interruptions (illicit replies)

Speaking 'out of turn' is a major source of pragmatic error. We can distinguish several types of interruption, which are listed below in order of increasing gravity:

(i) A addresses B. B replies before A finishes ('In turn interruption')

(ii) A addresses B. C replies to A

(iii) A addresses B. C replies to B

(iv) A addresses B. C replies to D

Amongst the main causes of interruption are: a failure to appreciate the formality or key of an interaction; insufficient mastery of the turn-taking mechnism; and ignorance of the discursive rights of particular roles. Much of this can be related to recent work on politeness phenomena (5) and face (6). Time and space do not permit me to discuss these matters here, but they are obviously of great importance, as is pragmatic failure in non-verbal communication which I have discussed in some detail elsewhere (7) and which I shall very

briefly refer to under 6) below.

e) Illicit performance of closing acts

The rights to terminate an exchange or interaction are amongst the most clearly defined of all, since they confer so much discourse control. It is the interviewer's right (... the parent's, the boss's) to 'have the last word'. Any other user is challenging these roles if he usurps those rights. The doctor, not the patient, says when the visit is over. The teacher, not the learner, decides when an exhange is finished. This is illustrated in the analysis of classroom language in Appendix A.

f) Failure to recognise closing acts

Social skills trainers in the early 1970's found that a common reason for their students' lack of success in interviews was that "You just can't get rid of them'. Signalling the end of an interaction -or even an exchange- can be a delicate matter, involving the use of preparatory formulae ("Well, I think that about wraps it up". "I'll see what I can do"), intonation (8) and kinesics. The complexity and variety of these adumbratory signals is, however, related to their social importance. But, pragmatic breakdown of this type may not simply be a matter of failure to recognise signals : it may be the expression of deeper misunderstandings related to role or to the nature and extent of the event in question.

6) Non-Verbal Communication (NVC)

This is not, of course, a discourse category "in its own right". NVC may be used to realise communicative acts, as when we beckon to someone to call them into our office or put our hand over a glass to refuse more wine: moreover, much modalisation in face-to face interaction is carried out non-verbally via facial expression and posture. We have also seen that turn-taking in interaction is largely realised non-verbally and clearly much of the information we gather about other people, and on which we base our perception of them and our consequent behaviour, is non-verbal: uniforms, grey hair, jewellery, colour, etc.

Here, then, we will do little more than remind ourselves of the communicative variety and importance of NVC and of its richness as a source of communicative interference, largely because it is so often completely unconscious.

Examples:

- Do not pat and Arab child, or, indeed, a child from any Muslim country on the head. Far from being regarded as a sign of affection it will be interpreted as an insult to his or her spiritual powers. Neither should you show the soles of your shoes to an Arab, or offer him anything with your left hand.
- Do not maintain prolonged eye-contact with a Japanese, it is regarded as impolite: look at his neck.
- Do not give the V-sign in England with the back of your hand towards your interlocutor. It is obscene.

Notes:

(1) Recent articles on this topic include:
Riley, P. (1981) "Towards a constrastive pragmalinguistics" in Fisiak, J.:Contrastive Linguistics and the Language Teacher, Pergamon.
Thomas, J. (1983) "Cross-cultural pragmatic failure", Applied Linguistics, Vol. 4, no. 2.
Richards, J. and Sukiwat, M. (1983) 'Language transfer and conversational competence' Applied Linguistics, Vol. 4, no.2.
Loveday, L. (1982) 'Communicative interference : a framework for contrastively analysing L2 communicative competence...' IRAL, Vol XX/1.
All these articles include good bibliographies.

(2) Olshtain, E. (1981) 'Sociocultural competence and language transfer : the case of apology'. Paper presented at the conference on language transfer. Ann Arbor, Michigan.

(3) Coulmas, F. (1981) Conversational Routine, The Hague, Mouton.

(4) See Faerch, C. and Kasper, G. (1983) Interpretive strategies, Longman.

(5) Brown, P. and Levinson, S. (1978) "Universals in language usage po-

liteness phenomena". In Goody, E.N., Questions and politeness; Strategies in social interaction, CUP.

(6) Goffman, E. (1971), Relations in public, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

(7) Riley, P. (1981), "Viewing Comprehension : l'oeil écoute" in The teaching of listening comprehension, ELT Documents Special, London, The British Council.

(8) Cf. Brazil, D. Coulthard, M., Johns, C. (1981), Discourse intonation and language teaching, Longman.

In the Following two Appendixes activities are described for developing communicative strategies (A) and for teaching/learning cultural competence (B).

Appendix A

Activities for developing communicative strategies

General requirements

1) Such activities must be interactive, though this does not preclude phases of sensitisation and preparation.
2) There will be some unshared information which the learner wishes to communicate or obtain. Learners will have alternatives as to how they go about this task (i.e. the nature of the activity or materials will not improve one particular course of action).
3) There must be some element of doubt as to the final outcome.

These requirements apply to all communicative activities - games, role-play simulations etc. The degree to which they elicit and practice strategies has more to do with the participants and their knowledge (of one another, the topic and the language) than with the nature of the activity. However, activities whose main purpose is information - sharing of some kind will obviously tend to encourage the use of strategies: these include quizzes, problem-solving, jigsaw listening, explanations, etc. Here are five such activities which aim at developing different aspects of the learner's strategic competence:

(1) Utterance-linking (Sensitisation)
Two apparently unrelated sentences are produced and learners are asked to invent situations in which they might have occurred together. (Can be carried out in the mother-tongue if wished).

(2) "Talking about talking". (Preparation and practice)
The learner is provided with the "raw material" for operating strategies. These will include set phrases such as:
"I'm sorry, I didn't understand what you said"
"Sorry, but could you repeat that please?"
"What does x mean?"
"I don't know what an x is, I'm afraid"
"Could you speak more slowly please, I'm a foreigner"
"How do you say y in English?"

"It's a sort of .....you know.....a thing for....a whatsit...."
"How do you say that in English? Is that right?"
"Should I say A or B in English?" etc. etc.

(3) What's new? One learner in each pair or group is provided with a written description and explanation of a new invention or product. The others only have a picture. The task is to share the information concerning the nature and functioning of the object in question. We have found the "new products" featured in "Newsweek" magazine to be excellent for this.

(4) Explain yourself! The learner is placed in an unlikely situation and asked to talk his/her way out of it. The very improbability of the situation usually guarantees numerous requests for clarification and a correspondingly detailed transfer of information.
Possible examples: What were you doing in the supermarket pushing a trolley with dozens of packets of milk in it?
Why were you seen throwing stones at a bus in the High Street yesterday?
On Saturday evening you invited your friends for Sunday lunch. When they arrived, you were watching TV and there was nothing to eat or drink.

(5) Paraphrasing. Learners are given a word (in a dictionary, on a slip of paper etc.) which they have to explain in any way they wish that does not involve actually using the word in question. A variation on this is the learner tries to get the rest of the group to say the word by asking questions designed at eliciting it.

Appendix B

Activities for teaching/learning cultural competence

1. "Traditional" Activities
   (a) Visits and exchanges (C.B.E.V.E., Fam hols, CNRS etc.).
   (b) Pen friends: "cassette friends".
   (c) Authentic documents:

written: newspapers, literature, technical documents, travel brochures, mail-order catalogues, etc.

sound: records, tapes, cassettes, radio.

visual: video, films, slides, posters.

(d) Projects, exposés.

(e) Academic study: history, geography, language, institutions.

(f) Show and tell sessions.

(g) "Bilingual" education (i.e. another subject, such as history or computer programming, conducted in L2).

(h) "Visitors" (non-teacher native speakers invited to class, out for a meal, etc.).

(i) Classroom debates and discussions: "brainstorming".

2. "Analytic" procedures

(a) "Discourse analysis": an extract from a sound or video recording is taken for discussion in terms of the intentions, attitudes, meanings and constructs of the participants. Learners are encouraged to identify and label speech functions, to describe attitudes, emotions and modalisations (politeness, certainty, irony) and meanings and beliefs.

(b) "Comparative analysis": different cultural views on the same topic are juxtaposed in some way: e.g. two separate recordings or articles, or a single recording with participants of different nationalities.

(A brief example will be demonstrated).

3. "Personal Construct" activities. (With acknowledgements to Claire Kramsch, MIT)

(a) Sensitisation

(i) Students construe in the foreign language. They take, for example, a list of characteristics ("a loud person", "private", "successful", "free", "respectful") or national holidays and customs, and use them to build up a series of constrasts as they relate either to their own or to the foreign culture. They then compare their lists and write up main points on the board.

Each tries to find a superordinate construct for his own line of thought as well as a bridge to the lines of thought of other students in the class.

(ii) Repertory grids

An experiment/demonstration will be included in the seminar.

(b) Practice and acquisition

(i) Brainstorming

This can include discussions of cases of communicative failure especially those where the learners were personally involved.

(ii) Exercises in dichotomous thinking

Starting out from an observable difference between the two cultures (which need not itself be of any great importance) learners build up lists of constructs and brainstorm on their "range of convenience".

Examples: Closed v.open office doors, handshake/no handshake, short lunch break/long lunch break, educational systems etc. Use is made of analogy and synonyms, constrast and autonyms to build up the list and to abstract superordinate categories. (A description and report on an experiment will be given).

(iii) Defence activities

Learners take the foreigner's part or point of view in discussions and debates, trying to explain "their" outlook to their fellow learners.

Role-play: examples

You are a French EEC administrator in England. Knowing what you know about the English and in particular the way they feel about the liberty of the individual, how would you argue in favour of one of the following:

- the introduction of identity cards in G.B.
- a European currency
- arming the police

You are an English salesman in France. Knowing what you know about France and the French, and in particular their loyalty

to home-produced goods, how would you compose a sales pitch for one of the following British products:

- English wine and cheese
- cars
- perfume
- computers

You have just been offered a position as a teacher of French in G.B./U.S.A. Amongst your teaching duties you have to give short introductory courses on one of the following:

- French history
- French institutions
- life in modern France
- the French national character

What aspects of your chosen topic would you choose to emphasise in order to help your students to understand better present-day French people?

Describe your daily routine to a foreigner whose native country you are familiar with. Knowing what you do about his/her country, what aspects will you emphasise or explain, and why?

Shifting your point of view: examples

Choose a small present for your foreign friend, who has asked for "something really French". Now explain in detail the reasons for your choice. Then reverse roles.

Send your friend a postcard. On it, explain why you made that particular choice. Reverse roles.

Draw up a list describing the characteristics of a national stereotype e.g. The typical Englishman

- wears a bowler hat, rolled umbrella
- has a perfect lawn
- drinks tea at 5 pm
- is hypocritical and nationalistic
- has a stiff upper lip

- is very keen on tradition
- is fond of animals, charitable
- is not too bright
- belongs to clubs and societies etc....

Now put yourself in the position of an Englishman who does not accept some or all of these propositions.

Using tourist brochures, slides etc., explain to the other learners in your group
- the image of your country your government wishes to give to people abroad
- what aspects of life in your country have been omitted.

Then reverse roles.
(Textbooks and guides for foreign visitors will also do - see example below).

Meals

Eating in France

Lunch and dinner are important times for the French and where possible they like to eat a leisurely meal with their family or friends. France is proud of its *haute cuisine* (high quality cooking) and there is a great variety of dishes *(plats)* with most regions having their own specialities.

Meals in France are not quite the same as here and the times of meals are a little different too, particularly for the evening meal. The French usually eat a light breakfast, a good lunch at midday and the family generally have dinner together in the evening. This gives them an opportunity to eat and talk *en famille*, expecially if the children eat *à la cantine* in school and if the parents are working.

Le petit déjeuner (breakfast) usually consists of a cup or bowl of white coffee *(du café au lait)*, or tea *(du thé)*, or drinking chocolate *(du chocolat)* with perhaps a few slices of French bread with butter and jam *(des tartines)*. Irish hotels call this a continental

breakfast. Sometimes for a treat they have *croissants* fresh from the *boulangerie* (baker's). Breakfast is an early meal as school often starts at 8 o'clock or 8.30 at the latest.

Le déjeuner (lunch) generally consists of an *hors d'oeuvre* (starter), for example, *crudités, carottes râpées, tomates, sardines à l'huile, pâté, charcuterie,* then meat or fish and vegetables, cheese or dessert (or both) followed by coffee. It is served from midday. Sometimes, of course, people are so busy that they only have *un sandwich.*

Le dîner (evening dinner) is a family meal which is had anytime from 7 o'clock. There is usually *potage* (soup) perhaps an *hors d'oeuvre,* then meat or fish and vegetables (which some people prefer to eat after the main course rather than with it), *une salade verte* (lettuce with French dressing), cheese and dessert.

Bread is served with lunch and dinner (*a baguette* cut into slices) which is useful for soaking up tasty gravy. Potatoes are a popular vegetable but are not served with every meal.

Les boissons (drinks): France is famous for its wines, but its *eau minérale* (mineral water) is also popular and many people drink it with their meals.

Le goûter: young French people eat a light snack called *le goûter* in the afternoon. It often consists of a piece of bread with chocolate, or a *pain au chocolat* (a pastry with chocolate). Younger children are particularly fond of a *chausson aux pommes* (a pastry with stewed apple in it).

Greetings

Meet the French

In France people have a special way of greeting one another. They always shake hands or kiss each other on both cheeks on meeting for the first time that day and also when saying goodbye. It is customary to shake hands when meeting someone you don't know very well, or a casual

friend. If people are good friends they usually kiss each other on both cheeks - the number of times depends on the people and on the region.

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